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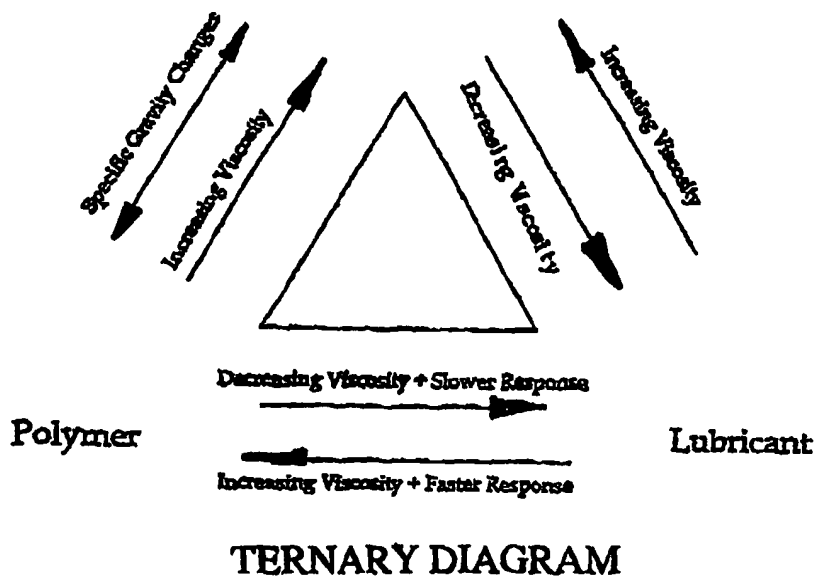
(54) Title: SMART PADDING SYSTEM UTILIZING AN ENERGY ABSORBENT MEDIUM AND ARTICLES OBTAINABLE THEREFROM

(57) Abstract

The present invention relates to an energy absorbent medium which is compliant and conformal in the absence of an applied force, and stiffens in proportion to the rate of an applied force to dissipate energy.

A polymeric based material composition comprising the medium offers absorption and dispersion of impact energy that is directly proportional to the rate of force applied. The polymer composition medium comprises a blend of a polymer, a lubricant and a filler to produce a conformal absorbent which exhibits dilatant (shear thickening) characteristics under high rates of force or stress. The novel medium comprises a diluent extended crosslinked viscoelastic polymer composition. The polymer has reformable sacrificial

chemical bonds which are preferentially broken under a high rate of deformation and which reform under static conditions. Typical applications of this medium include absorbent for sports padding, athletic equipment, motor vehicle seats, bulletproof vests, medical equipment, industrial equipment, weaponry, and athletic playing fields.



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TITLE

SMART PADDING SYSTEM UTILIZING AN ENERGY ABSORBENT MEDIUM AND ARTICLES OBTAINABLE THEREFROM

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FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to an energy absorbent medium and, in particular, to a polymeric based material for absorption and dispersion of impact energy which is formable into articles useful in the protection of animate and inanimate objects.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

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Padding materials and structures have been developed to protect animate objects such as the human body, and inanimate objects which are susceptible to injury or damage when subjected to shock, vibration or stress.

In a number of contexts the human body requires protection from external impact and vibration beyond the normal protection afforded by the structure of the body itself.

15

For instance, impact stress is a significant concern in contact sports such as football, hockey and soccer in which the participant is periodically or constantly subject to high impact stress. Bruising, fracture, joint impact trauma and osteoarthritis, susceptibility to sprains, muscle cramps, tendinitis, and strains, fatigue, and discomfort are all incidents of such impact stress being imparted to the body of the participant.

20

Another example of high impact stress attenuation is represented by the absorbent of seats, steering wheels, and structures surrounding the driver of a vehicle, designed to cushion the body of the driver in motor sports.

For those who are confined to bed, in wheel chairs, or in body contact with other medical implements requiring prolonged contact between the body and the implement,

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the difficulties can be quite substantial. As those involved in the field well understand, substantial problems arise from contact between the body and articles which require prolonged contact with the body, such as medical devices, prosthetics, orthopedic implements, such as casts, braces and the like, aids for the disabled such as

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wheelchairs, crutches, beds for those who are confined there. Through prolonged or high stress contact, a variety of undesirable consequences often plague the users of such constructs. Problems range from ulcerations (bed sores), to dermal inflammation, blisters, and simple irritation and discomfort.

- 5 Padding in use today for energy dissipation, cushioning or shock absorbing applications is typically made of assorted foams, urethanes and plastic, rubber, and metal. The materials are formed into shape by stitching, die cutting, molding or shearing. Pre-formed pads are made in various sizes that conform over a limited range of applications. Pads molded from foams produce a solid, semi-stiff piece.
- 10 Although molded pads may be custom fit to an object or an individual, they are not compliant to the object or user. Molded pads, for instance, do not change shape as the anatomy of the user may change during a given activity. For example, a jet fighter pilot's body changes under g-forces and may swell at higher altitudes. Another example is present in motorsports where a race car driver can lose over ten pounds
- 15 during a race, in which case a custom molded seat would then be too loose and not provide the needed support. Metal pads offer protection against shock, however lack comfort and are not lightweight and provide little or no vibration protection. In some instances metal pads are the cause of damage.

- 20 Polymer gel padding is currently being used in applications where cushioning is required. The gels are typically manufactured from silicone and urethane elastomers which are cross linked into specific geometries. The gel pads are extremely soft and easily compressed, but do not flow and could not be classified as a fluid. When weight is applied the gel pad is soft enough that it will collapse to support the weight, but only in a single dimension. It is generally recognized that polymer gel padding
- 25 does not offer significant shock protection or protection from side-to-side motions or g-force loading. The person or object will typically move around in the padding since it will not shear. In many instances the object to be protected may "bottom out" within the padding. These padding materials are typically of higher specific gravity than the current invention which incorporates lower specific gravity fillers.

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It would be particularly beneficial to produce a padding composition which overcomes the limitations of current padding, and which also exhibits the capability to change the padding's physical characteristics in response to applied loads or forces.

Traditional padding does not generally maintain intimate contact with the portion
5 of a human body to be protected. In order for the body to be totally supported by the padding, the substrate material must crush to accommodate the contours of the body. Under sudden applied force, a human body or inanimate object will often move around within the voids between the padding and the user or object.

Accordingly it is a principal object of the present invention to provide
10 compositions, structures and padding articles made therefrom which are conformable to the surface of an animate or inanimate object, and which responds to an applied force or stress by minimizing the transfer of such force or stress to the object.

It is an object of the present invention to provide for prolonged or high impact or vibration stress contact structures which respond elastically to applied impact forces
15 between an animate or inanimate object and the structure to limit peak impact force applied to the object.

It is an object of the present invention to provide padding articles for use in contact sports such as football, hockey, soccer and basketball that are conformable to the human body and which exhibit the characteristic of a viscous liquid in the absence of a
20 sudden applied force, and convert to a near solid elastomer in response to a high rate applied force to minimize the transfer of the force to the human body.

It is an object of the present invention to provide padding articles which respond elastically to applied vibration and forces between an object and the article to attenuate the vibration and force applied to the object.

25 It is another object of the present invention to provide articles for prolonged or high impact or vibration stress contact which are highly conformable to, and supportive of, the object surface configuration.

It is a further object of the present invention to provide for prolonged or high impact or vibration stress contact structures which respond resiliently to applied
30 impact forces between an object and the structure with controlled or tuned elastic hysteresis.

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An additional object of the present invention is to provide for prolonged or high impact or vibration stress contact absorbent, cushions, and like structures which provide for improved tolerance of the human body to contact with medical appliances and related structures and articles, including neck braces, wheel chair cushions, bed pads, absorbent for orthopedic appliances such as braces, casts and the like.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

Generally, the present invention provides a high impact energy absorbent medium comprising the use of a conformable, resilient component which includes an envelope containing a polyborosiloxane elastomer. The response of the system to applied force optimizes high impact and vibration and repetitive impact shock absorption. The high level of conformability is a key to preventing adverse consequences of prolonged contact.

The invention is a self-conforming, compliant, high impact energy absorbent medium that continuously conforms to the environment in which it is used. At rest the medium acts as a viscous liquid and it offers conformal cushioning and support for a protected object. When a sudden or high rate impact force is applied to the medium it becomes dilatant and rheopectic which causes the composition (a thermo-rheologically complex fluid) contained within an envelope defining a padding article, to become more rigid (or viscous) with an increasing rate of deformation. The medium will stiffen and dissipate energy in accordance with the rate of the force applied to the article. When the external force is not present or is of low rate impact, the medium returns to a lower elastic modulus state and its original conforming condition. The term "rheopectic" defines the property of a composition in which elastic modulus increases with time under shear or suddenly applied force or stress.

In the broadest terms, the present invention provides an energy absorbent and form compliant article for cushioning animate and inanimate objects comprising a pliable, conformable confinement means for containing and controlling the shape and placement of an energy absorbent medium, and a highly conformable and energy absorbent medium confined within said confinement means comprising a visco-

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elastic, plasticized rheologically dilatent, polymer composition. The polymer exhibits reformable sacrificial chemical bonds which are preferentially broken under high shear conditions and yet quickly reform under low stress conditions.

As used herein viscoelasticity refers to the property of having a high viscosity fluid
5 characteristic under low stress conditions and exhibiting a substantial increase in apparent viscosity under applied stress, so that the material behaves as a solid under such high applied stress conditions. In the context of the present invention, a viscoelastic material is one which behaves as a solid elastomer under high rate impact forces, and as a highly conformable viscous liquid under rest or when subject to a low
10 rate of applied force.

By providing a controlled hysteresis, the absorption of energy by elastic compression can be carefully tuned to serve the requirements of use in a highly protective and efficient fashion. In like fashion, it is possible to control, within limits, the proportion of applied energy returned and transmitted by any elastic rebound, and
15 the proportion dissipated or absorbed and changed into other forms of energy, i.e. heat.

In static circumstances or under a low rate of applied or impact force, the material conforms to the object with which it is in contact by viscous flow. The viscous flow is limited and constrained by the containment system so that it does not result in the
20 material flowing out of areas to be protected. While the composition of the present invention is responsive to stresses by viscous flow, the effect is largely an elastic deformation and flow is limited in the usual time span of normal stresses. At moderate to high stress, such as the imposition of sudden impact, and consequently a high rate of applied force, the material deforms and absorbs or dissipates the imposed
25 energy by viscoelastic deformation or elastic compression. Both the rate of energy absorption, resulting from deceleration of the impact force, and the rate of elastic rebound are controlled by determining the elastic hysteresis. The major effect is spreading the energy transfer associated with the sudden impact over a much greater time span so that the peak incident force levels transferred to the object are reduced.

30 Upon exposure to prolonged or sudden impact or other stresses, and particularly applied stresses beyond the viscoelastic limit, the polymer cross-link bonds are

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broken, absorbing energy of the impact, and "deadening" the impact. Polymer chain scission is minimized by the preferential breaking of the cross-link bonds. The energy which breaks the chemical bonds is converted largely to heat. The broken cross-link bonds will be reformed, and the polymer thus has a very substantial life span. Very effective protection from polymer degradation can be provided for a prolonged life of articles in such fashion.

The articles of the present invention preferably employ a borosiloxane elastomer which may be formulated to provided an optimal response to the applied dynamic loading. The high energy absorbent comprises a containing envelope and a polyborosiloxane elastomer composition contained therein. The absorbent envelope can be formed in a variety of shapes and thicknesses. The time required to recover and the actual restoring forces are typically based on the thickness of the structure, as defined by the confining envelope and associated structures; the apparent viscosity, rebound, plastic flow and related properties of the polymer under the applied stress; and the inherent time-dependent response, i.e. hysteresis, of the polymer formulation. Varying any of these properties will also vary the recovery rate of the absorbent article.

The containment envelope may be formed using any flexible material such as a film or sheet of a flexible plastic material, or relatively non-porous fabric, foil, leather, or the like so long as its mechanical and chemical integrity are sufficient to contain a silicone polymer with fluid like behavior.

Polyborosiloxanes have unique elastomeric properties. The fluid will dramatically increase its apparent viscosity to behave as a near solid under sudden impact or shear, a property known in the art as viscoelasticity. This property increases lateral support and impact damping. Under low rates of applied force or stress, polyborosiloxanes readily flow, but under a high rate of applied force or stress they exhibit an increase in apparent viscosity, high compression modulus, and high elastic rebound. These materials also are extremely resilient and experience little permanent deformation after repeated loading. This makes polyborosiloxanes unique as an energy absorbent medium. In addition, the hysteresis of polyborosiloxanes can be altered to optimize

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the properties for specific applications and environments by the addition of lubricants (plasticizers or dilutents), fillers (thickeners), and the like.

In operation, when the energy absorbent medium described above is installed in an article, such as a sports pad or glove, designed for body contact, it operates to provide the wearer with protective shock absorption and energy dissipation. A significant beneficial characteristic of such a padding article is the ability to adjust or tune the hysteresis and plastic flow when stress is applied to the polymer.

The rebound rate of the article may be tuned to meet the needs of a particular user and/or a particular activity. These factors in combination determine the dynamic loading to which the recovery rate of the article may be tuned. Through tuning, the maximum shock absorption capabilities may be achieved for a variety of specific applications.

Polyborosiloxane elastomers have a wide range of properties and can easily be tailored to a specific viscosity, time dependent mechanical response (elastic hysteresis) and other desirable properties. Borosiloxane polymers can be polymerized or formulated to have a range of relaxation times spanning several orders of magnitude at room temperature.

A high degree of adjustment may be achieved through blending different polyborosiloxanes and by compounding the polymer with lubricants and fillers. The containment envelope itself may be varied in shape, dimensions and details of configuration depending upon the characteristics of the particular application.

For the compounding of the polymer and tuning the hysteresis and related properties, lubricants such as silicone oils, fatty acids, and fatty acid salts and greases may be used. Solid particulate fillers such as solid particulate or fibrous fillers, such as silica, or microspheres of silica, phenolic resins or thermoplastics, may be used.

The above-described novel high impact energy absorbent material compositions have numerous uses and applications. The following are representative padding article applications illustrative of the breadth of beneficial uses for the novel absorbent material compositions:

- (1) Sports padding articles such as shoulder pad lining, rib protection, shin guards, hip and thigh pads in athletic gear. The protective high impact energy

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absorbent composition may also be embodied in the form of a bandage, elastic sleeve, or the use of wrapping material such as gauze to secure the composition to protect the limb of a human body in addition to the use of a padding article;

5 (2) Hand protecting padding articles, including gloves, for use in sports and industry;

(3) Seat padding articles for motor vehicles such as race car absorbent in seats to dissipate high vibration, g-force side-loads and shock. The high impact energy absorbent response of the seat padding article will relieve pressure points created by uneven, rough road surfaces hard seating surfaces and crashes;

10 (4) Medical padding articles for use as "blocks" to support patients during procedures such as X-ray, neck braces, or as conformal absorbent and cushioning to uniformly support the body weight of persons with limited or no motor skills such as a paraplegic. Such padding articles can be used to support body weight without allowing pressure points, without allowing the material to "bottom out" or without allowing the material to take a "one-time set" to a particular shape as is the case with many traditional padding materials. The absorbent medium can be used to support a person in a sitting position (i.e., a wheelchair) or laying flat (i.e., a hospital bed). The medium will totally conform to the user without creating voids between uneven surfaces and the anatomy of the patient;

15 (5) Extreme trauma protection padding articles for use in combination with other protective gear. A bullet proof vest with the novel medium as a backing will produce a vest that dissipates the energy transferred through the vest after being impacted by a bullet;

20 (6) Subsurface padding articles for use, as an example, beneath an artificial surface of an athletic field to provide cushioning and energy dissipation to provide comfort and reduce injuries. The padding article for an athletic field may consist of a number of separate "cells" exhibiting different impact response characteristics. For example, the infield area of a baseball field could be made "softer" than the outfield area.

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- (7) Industrial and military equipment padding articles to provide shock and vibration dissipation in applications such as motor mounts, and mounts for weaponry on board naval ships;
- (8) Packaging padding articles to protect objects such as electronic equipment during shipping; and
- (9) In situ padding articles that can be formed in the field to protect an injured area of a person from further injury by placing the conformal absorbent medium in contact with the injured area and placing a conventional wrap over the medium to secure it.

It has been found that the requirements of protecting an object, including the human body from impact, vibration, repetitive stress and prolonged contact stress can be enhanced by articles or structures containing the novel composition which afford several specific characteristics.

- The structures to be employed should provide the maximum contact surface consistent with the required configuration of the structure or the article or device of which it is a part;
- The structures must be highly conformable to the body surface configuration;
- The structures must freely change conformation to preserve high conformity to the body surface configuration with changes in position or posture of the body;
- The structure should respond elastically to a high rate of applied impact forces between the body or object and the structure; and
- The structure ordinarily should not impair or interfere with normal body functions such as limiting the range of motion or the like.

It has been found that the requirements of protecting the body from high kinetic energy impact stress can be enhanced by structures which afford several additional specific characteristics;

- Attenuation is, in part, a function of both elastic and plastic or fluid deformation. Impact energy should be transmitted through the medium in lateral directions, at angles to the axis of the impact motion, i.e., spreading the impact energy over as wide an area as possible;

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- Attenuation is also, in part, a function of the time for transmission of stress to the body. An impact force varies with the square of the speed;
- An important additional factor is the rate and magnitude of elastic rebound.

5 The requirements of these two major categories of object contact and protection share a substantial number of common considerations and demands and are generally similar, except that the high impact protection has additional criteria not required of low stress, prolonged contact.

10 The demands of repetitive motion stress and vibration protection share the requirements of both prolonged body contact and high impact stress, and have additional requirements and characteristics.

The present invention provides a cushioning and energy-absorbent medium and articles made therefrom which meet these criteria, for both static and low-stress prolonged contact and for high rate impact contact in a highly effective manner to provide for superior performance when compared to the padding and cushioning materials of the prior art.

15 Other advantages of the present invention will become apparent from a perusal of the following detailed description of presently preferred embodiments of the invention taken in connection with the accompanying drawings.

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BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE DRAWINGS

Figure 1 is a ternary diagram relating the amounts of polymer, lubricant and filler components of the present invention to viscosity, or elastic modulus, and response time of the absorbent medium;

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Figures 2(a), 2(b) and 2(c) are graphical illustrations of the performance of two traditional pads and a padding article made in accordance with the present invention;

Figures 3(a) and 3(b) are illustrations of a padding article made in accordance with the present invention;

30

Figures 4(a) and 4(b) are illustrations of an application of the novel padding composition in a sports glove;

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Figure 5 is an illustration of an application of the novel padding composition in the seat of a race car;

Figures 6(a) and 6(b) illustrate the application of the novel padding composition to an athletic playing field; and

- 5 Figures 7(a), 7(b) and 7(c) are pictorial illustrations of various padding configurations incorporating the novel medium of the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

- 10 The present invention provides an energy absorbent medium and a method for producing high impact energy absorbent formulations and articles therefrom using polymer-based materials to create a "smart" padding system which may be customized for specific applications. At rest, or in response to a low rate of applied force, the absorbent provides conformable cushioning and support with the ability to adjust and
- 15 reshape itself to the anatomy of the object or user. Upon sudden impact, or a high rate of applied force, the absorbent reacts to the shear forces, or g-force loading, and rapidly stiffens to dissipate energy, shock and vibration.

- The novel polymer composition is a complex fluid comprising a polymer blended with a lubricant and a filler at a ratio to produce an energy absorbent material response
- 20 which is appropriate for a given application. The polymer composition is a putty-like material that does not exhibit flow at room temperature unless a force is applied. This characteristic of the composition contributes to the desired conformal property of the absorbent medium.

- The lubricant (which may be a liquid or pasty lubricant) and the filler (which
- 25 typically is a finely divided solid filler) are dispersed throughout the polymer via a mechanical means. The lubricant exhibits either liquid or paste qualities which inherently provides little or no support or energy absorption.

- A suitable polymer is one that exhibits hydrogen bonding. These hydrogen bonds result from a dipole interaction between polymer chains. The hydrogen bonds formed
- 30 are not permanent covalent bonds, but are labile or reformable bonds which provide the dilatant behavior characteristic of polyborosiloxanes. Polymers that exhibit

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hydrogen bonding, in addition to polyborosiloxanes include, Xanthan gum, guar gum, polyvinylalcohol/sodium tetraborate, as well as other hydrogen bonding polymer compositions. Polyborosiloxane exhibits a very high resiliency or energy return characteristic in the pure form.

5 Suitable fillers are typically inert materials which range from free-flowing to caking powders, micropheres, pulp, fibers, microcellular foams, closed-cell foams and other materials.

While none of the composition components itself demonstrates the necessary properties to achieve the desired shock absorbing and energy dissipation, their
10 blending creates a non-slumping fluid which exhibits the desired rate dependent characteristics.

The novel high impact energy absorbent material compositions based on this invention exhibit a time or rate dependent response to an applied force or deformation which enables the customizing of the response of these material formulations to
15 different types of loading and deformation situations. The material formulation may be tailored through the addition of an incompatible lubricant which effectively increases the distance between polymer chains. This has the effect of decreasing the strength of and quantity of the hydrogen bonds. Both the alteration of the dipole interaction between polymer chains and decreasing the number of dipole interactions
20 results in altering the time dependent and rate dependent behavior of the material formulation.

A high impact energy absorbent material made in accordance with this invention behaves at times as a cross linked elastomer and at other times as a viscous fluid. This thermo-rheologically complex behavior results in the unique behavior and subsequent
25 performance of the high impact energy absorbent material compositions. While the response of the composition to sudden impact forces is generally described in terms of energy absorbing for the purpose of convenience, these compositions actually absorb little energy. Rather, the time dependent, or rate dependent, response of the material composition to sudden impact enables the distribution of a localized load or impact
30 over a larger surface area and over a longer period of time which results in lower peak stresses being transmitted to the protected animate or inanimate object. The energy

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absorption through plastic or viscous deformation is minimal. This can be demonstrated by loading the novel absorbent material composition cyclically and observing that the resultant thermal increase is minimal.

The fillers used are preferably added to stabilize what is often an otherwise thermodynamically unstable mixture and to increase the viscosity to the point of a non-slumping putty-like material composition. Using a filler material such as pulp or fiber increases the tear strength of the composition and provides the energy dissipation.

An example of an energy absorbent medium made in accordance with this invention is a 100 pph (parts per hundred) of polyborosiloxane polymer, 60 pph of a metal soap gelled paraffinic lubricant, and 20 pph of plastic microspheres. This is equivalent to a composition of 60%, 30% and 10% respectively.

The ratio of the composition components is determined by the desired absorbent performance for a given application.

Referring to the ternary diagram of Figure 1, the medium compositions which have more filler have higher viscosities or elastic modulus, and are less conformable. Medium compositions having more polymer have a faster response time, and those with more lubricant are less viscous and have a slower response time. Medium compositions with higher viscosities have faster shear response times than lower viscosity compositions.

The absorbent medium composition typically includes a hydrogen bonded polymer which has its time-dependent (hysteresis) properties modified by the addition of a lubricant and a filler to make the composition highly viscous at room temperature.

The composition is a mixture of materials which results in a fluid which does not exhibit flow at room temperature. The composition, which is preferably comprised of a silicone polymer, a lubricant and a filler, is a highly viscous fluid at room temperature. When a padding article employing the composition is exposed to a high rate energy impact, the composition responds by increasing its apparent viscosity and subsequently transferring the energy in a longer time than the time it is exposed to the impact, which decreases the maximum or peak force transferred to the protected human body or object. This inherent property of the composition is ideal for use as a

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shock absorber or energy attenuating pad for protection of the human body as well as other objects. The shock absorbing material composition is suitable for packaging or encapsulation in a containment or envelope for use in high impact energy absorbent or protective gear.

5 The unique performance of a padding article employing a material composition made in accordance with the present invention is illustrated in Figure 2 where the response of such a padding article to a sudden, or high rate, applied force is compared to the response of traditional padding materials. The curves (a), (b) and (c) of Figures 2(a), 2(b) and 2(c) are plots of the force (F) transferred to an object protected by the
10 respective pads over time (T). The curve (a) corresponds to the response of a rigid plastic pad; curve (b) corresponds to the response of a soft rubber, or gel pad; and curve (c) corresponds to the response of a pad article made in accordance with the present invention.

15 The energy dissipation of the applied force is the integral of the force (F) as a function of time (T).

If all the kinetic energy is ultimately transferred to the object protected by the pads, areas A1, A2 and A3 under the curves (a), (b) and (c) will be equal. However, it is apparent that the impact of the applied force on the protected object differs dramatically.

20 The rigid plastic pad response as illustrated in Figure 2(a) transfers the applied force as a high peak stress in a short period of time and impacts a limited surface of a protected object.

25 The soft rubber, or gel, pad response as illustrated in Figure 2(b) transfers the applied force as a moderate peak stress over somewhat longer period of time than the rigid plastic pad and impacts a slightly larger surface of the protected object.

The response of the padding article made in accordance with the present invention, as illustrated in Figure 2(c), transfers the applied force as a low peak stress over an extended period of time, over a larger surface of the protected object, thereby minimizing the peak force impacting the object.

30 The following is representative of compositions, formulations and their applications:

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| <u>COMPOSITION</u> | <u>APPLICATION</u> |
|---|---|
| 60% Polyborosiloxane 30% Paraffinic Grease 10% Pulp Fiber | Exhibits high rate impact response. Suitable for sports padding. |
| 60% Polyborosiloxane 20% Paraffinic Grease 20% Plastic Microspheres | Exhibits very low flow, very low density. Suitable for shoe padding. |
| 50% Polyborosiloxane 35% Paraffinic Grease 15% Powdered Plastics | Exhibits a response to an applied force suitable for cushions. |

An embodiment of the invention as a padding article 10 is illustrated in Figures 3(a) and 3(b) wherein the novel material composition 12 is packaged within a containment 14.

5 Figures 4(a) and 4(b) illustrates the application of the novel material composition as padding inserts 18 in a sports glove 20 while Figure 5 illustrates the use of the novel material composition as padding elements 22 of a race car seat 24.

As shown in Figures 6(a) and 6(b), padding cells 26 made in accordance with the present invention may be packaged in tiles 28, and multiple tiles positioned between
 10 the surface of an athletic playing field 30, and the artificial surface 32 and backing 34 to provide energy dissipation and reduce injuries. Other surfaces such as a basketball floor, boxing ring, etc. could benefit from the novel padding medium.

Figure 7(a) is an illustration of a padding article 40 designed to protect the shoulder 42 of a human body.

15 Figure 7(b) and 7(c) are illustrations of padding articles 44 and 46 respectively for use as a pad to protect the shoulder, thigh, hip or shin of a human body.

The preferred embodiment of the current invention is a polymer composition which is prepared as a blend of a polyborosiloxane polymer which exhibits a high degree of intermolecular bonding, a lubricant which is preferably a hydrocarbon-based

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grease or fluid, and a filler which can be selected from microspheres, powdered plastics, ceramics, metals or fibers and pulps material fillers. Filler is added in an amount to minimize the inherent energy return of the polymer but less than an amount that would make the composition take on the characteristics of the filler.

5 A base polymer, which exhibits intermolecular or hydrogen bonding, can be mechanically blended with a filler and a lubricant to produce a composition which has a rate-dependent, mechanical response to applied loads or forces. The more lubricant added to the medium, the longer the response time. The base polymer is a highly resilient material and exhibits a near complete energy return and instantaneous
10 response to an applied load and provides the rate dependent response of the composition. The lubricant provides the conformability of the composition thus allowing the polymer to shear without fracture. The filler, which does not flow, serves to stabilize the composition.

15 The preferred characteristics of the novel composition include the non-slumping or lack of cold flow of the mixture. The composition will conform as an applied load deforms the composition such as in a seat pad. However, the static viscosity of the composition is sufficiently high that little or no flow occurs without an applied load.

It is also preferred that the lubricant be totally miscible with the polyborosiloxane so as to make a mixture which is not completely thermodynamically stable. To this
20 mixture is added sufficient filler to produce the desired characteristics of shock attenuation and static viscosity. If a low density filler is added, it decreases the apparent density of the medium.

The preferred range of composition is, in weight percentages, from 90% polymer to less than 20% polymer; lubricant from less than 20% to in excess of 60%; and filler
25 from 0% to 90%, dependent upon the particle size and specific gravity of the filler. A typical high-impact, energy-absorbent material formulation in accordance with this invention would be 70% polyborosiloxane; 20% lubricant; and 10% filler.

The fillers are desirably of small particle size and low hardness. As there may be particle-to-particle contact, the composition should not behave as a monolithic block
30 of the filler. What has been used and found desirable are roughly equivalent volumetric amounts of a mixture of polymer and lubricant to the filler. It is highly

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desirable that the filler have a cohesive interaction with the polymer/lubricant blend, i.e., so that either the polymer or the lubricant (or both) will wet the surface of the filler to provide a viscosity enhancement to the blend over and above that of a noninteracting filler.

- 5 A high-impact, energy-absorbent medium of a blend of polyborosiloxane with a lubricant and filler made for use in high-impact situations was tested by firing a 9mm round from a pistol into bulletproof vest backed by an absorbent composition of this invention. Bulletproof vests, typically made using Kevlar fabrics, will stop most bullets from penetrating the vests; however, the impact of the energy absorbed by the
- 10 user of the vest is significant. Injuries such as severe bruising, broken bones and internal hemorrhaging occur when a bullet impacts the vest, resulting in long recovery times and, in some cases, death – even though the bullet did not penetrate the victim.

- A test was conducted to view the energy-dissipating capability of the inventive medium under extremely high rates of energy impact. It consisted of firing a pistol at
- 15 close range into a bulletproof vest with and without the use of the novel high-impact, energy-absorbent composition. Shots were fired at close range (i.e., three feet) to observe trauma. A first test was conducted without the use of the novel energy-absorbent medium. A second test was conducted to observe the benefits of using the novel medium placed inside of the vest and against the torso of a mannequin.

- 20 In the first test, the bulletproof vest was placed over a hollow mannequin torso made from a material that replicated bone. A 9mm pistol was discharged into the bulletproof vest from three feet. The 9mm round did not penetrate the vest; however, a four-inch hole was created in the mannequin from the shock that passed through the vest due to the high energy impact.

- 25 In the second test, a high-impact, energy-absorbent medium consisting of a blend of polyborosiloxane, a lubricant and filler was placed behind the bulletproof vest. Once again, a 9mm pistol was discharged into the bulletproof vest from three feet. The result of the test showed no sign of impact on the mannequin torso. The test was conducted three times – all with the same results. The medium remained a fluid at rest
- 30 before and after the force was applied. During the test, the energy-absorbent medium

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responded to the sudden and high shear force resulting from the impact of the bullet by stiffening appropriately to dissipate high volumes of energy in a very short cycle time.

The applications of the novel energy-absorbent medium of the invention are numerous.

5 The energy-absorbent and form-compliant medium of the present invention, when applied to a steering wheel of a motor vehicle, offers highly desirable properties. Typically, a plurality of capsules of the present invention are connected to and extend around the steering wheel. Each of such capsules is disposed at selected intervals around the steering wheel. It is appreciated that one capsule could be incorporated into
10 the steering wheel without departing from the spirit of the invention. For example, one continuous loop of a capsule could be incorporated into the steering wheel.

Other types of equipment, such as sporting equipment, can employ the features and benefits of the present invention. A golf club, for example, includes a head, a shaft and a handle wrapped with a handle grip. The handle grip may be fabricated
15 from the energy-absorbent and form-compliant medium of the present invention, or the medium may be included in the shaft.

A tennis racket includes a head and face, a throat and tennis handle wrapped in a tennis grip. The tennis grip may be fabricated, in part, from the energy-absorbent and form-complaint medium of the present invention.

20 A baseball bat includes a handle segment which, in some contexts, may have a grip wrapped around it. The baseball grip may be fabricated from the energy-absorbent and form-compliant medium of the present invention.

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CLAIMS:

1. An energy absorbent medium comprising a polymer composition which behaves as a near solid elastomer under a high rate of applied force, and as a highly conformable viscous liquid at rest.
2. An energy absorbent medium as claimed in Claim 1 wherein said polymer composition comprises a viscoelastic, plasticized polymer composition.
3. An energy absorbent medium as claimed in Claim 1 wherein said polymer is a borosiloxane elastomer.
4. An energy absorbent medium as claimed in Claim 1 wherein said polymer is a polyborosiloxane elastomer.
5. An energy absorbent medium as claimed in Claim 1 wherein said polymer is a hydrogen bonding polymer.
6. An energy absorbent medium as claimed in Claim 1 wherein said polymer is selected from a group comprising polyborosiloxane, Xanthan gum, guar gum and polyvinylalcohol sodium tetraborate.
7. An energy absorbent medium as claimed in Claim 1 wherein said polymer composition is conformable under a low rate of applied force.
8. An energy absorbent medium as claimed in Claim 1 wherein said polymer composition comprises a blend of a polymer, a lubricant and a filler.
9. An energy absorbent medium as claimed in Claim 8 wherein the blend of the polymer, lubricant and filler may be varied to satisfy the conformance and time response requirements of a given absorbent medium application.

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10. An energy absorbent medium as claimed in Claim 8 wherein said blend ranges in weight percentages of polymer between about 90% to about 20%, lubricant from about 60% to about 20% and filler from about 90% to about 0%.
11. An energy absorbent medium as claimed in Claim 1 wherein said polymer
5 composition comprises a plasticized cross-linked, viscoelastic polymer composition, the polymer having reformable sacrificial chemical bonds which are preferentially broken under high shear conditions and which reform under low stress conditions.
12. An energy absorbent and form compliant article for impact absorption and dissipation comprising:
- 10 an energy absorbent medium confined by a confinement means, wherein said medium comprises a plasticized, cross-linked viscoelastic polymer composition, said polymer having reformable sacrificial chemical bonds which are preferentially broken under high shear conditions and which reform under low stress conditions.
13. A method for forming a self conforming, compliant energy absorbent medium
15 comprising the step of blending a polymer, lubricant and filler to form a viscoelastic, rheologically dilatent plasticized polymer composition which dissipates the energy of an applied force or stress in accordance with the rate of the applied force or stress.
14. A method as claimed in claim 13 when said polymer is a hydrogen bonded polymer.
- 20 15. A method as claimed in claim 13 wherein said polymer is a borosiloxane elastomer.
16. A method as claimed in claim 13 wherein said polymer is a polyborosiloxane elastomer.

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17. A method as claimed in claim 13 wherein the constituents of said composition range in weight percentages of polymer between about 90% to about 20%, lubricant from about 60% to about 20%, and filler from about 90% to about 0%.
18. A method as claimed in claim 13 wherein said polymer is selected from a group comprising polyborosiloxane, xanthan gum, guar gum and polyvinylalcohol sodium tetraborate.
19. A method as claimed in claim 17 wherein the blend of the polymer, lubricant and filler may be varied to satisfy the conformance and time response requirements of a given medium application.
20. A self-conforming, compliant energy absorbent medium comprising a viscoelastic, rheologically dilatent polymer composition which dissipates the energy of an applied force or stress in accordance with the rate of the applied force or stress.
21. A medium as claimed in claim 20 wherein composition functions as a solid elastomer under a high rate of applied force or stress, and as a highly conformable viscous liquid at rest.
22. A medium as claimed in claim 20 wherein the polymer of said composition comprises reformable sacrificial chemical bonds which are preferentially broken under high shear conditions and which reform under low stress conditions.
23. A medium as claimed in claim 20 wherein the polymer of said composition is a hydrogen bonded polymer.
24. A medium as claimed in claim 20 wherein the polymer of said composition is a borosiloxane elastomer.

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25. A medium as claimed in claim 20 wherein said polymer composition comprises a blend of a polymer, a lubricant and a filler.
26. An energy absorbent article comprising:
an energy absorbent medium confined by a confinement means, wherein said medium
5 being a viscoelastic, rheologically dilatent polymer composition which regards as a
near solid elastomer in response to a high rate of applied force or stress, and a highly
conformable viscous liquid at rest.
27. An article as claimed in claim 26 wherein said confinement means consists of
said polymer composition further polymerized into a flexible boundary.
- 10 28. An article as set forth in claim 26 wherein said confinement means is a
protective shield.
29. An article as set forth in claim 26 wherein said confinement means is flexible.
30. A method for preparing an energy absorbent medium which behaves as a near
solid elastomer under high impact force, and is a highly conformable viscous liquid
15 under rest conditions or low applied force, comprising the step of:
blending a polymer, a lubricant and a filler to form a thermodynamically
stable, non-slumping composition; the ratio of the blended materials being such as to
produce a desired response of said medium to an applied force.
31. A method as claimed in claim 30 wherein said polymer is a hydrogen bonding
20 polymer.
32. A method as claimed in claim 30 wherein said polymer is selected from a
group comprising polyborosiloxane, xanthan gum, guar gum and polyvinylalcohol
sodium tetraborate.

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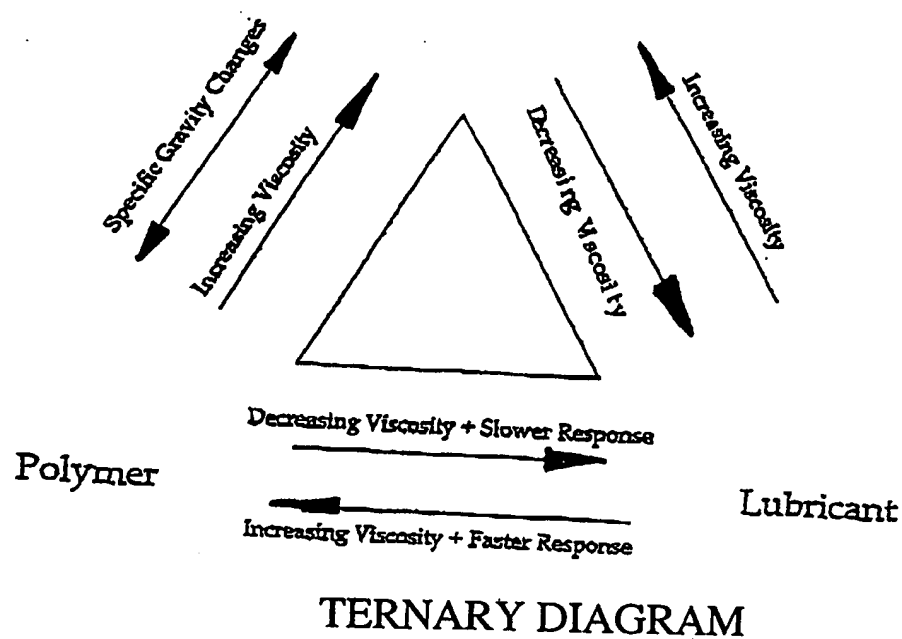
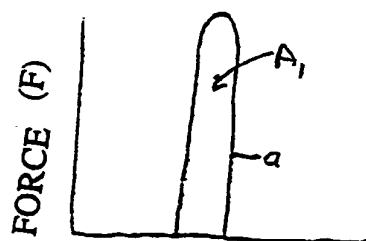


FIGURE 1

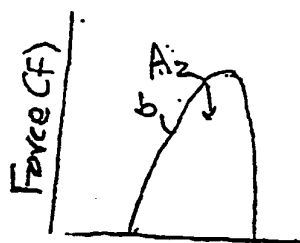
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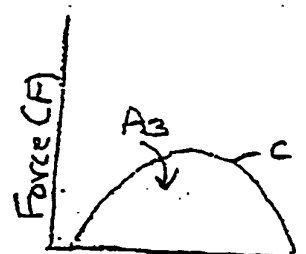
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TIME (T)
FIGURE 2(a)



TIME (T)
FIGURE 2(b)



TIME (T)
FIGURE 2(c)

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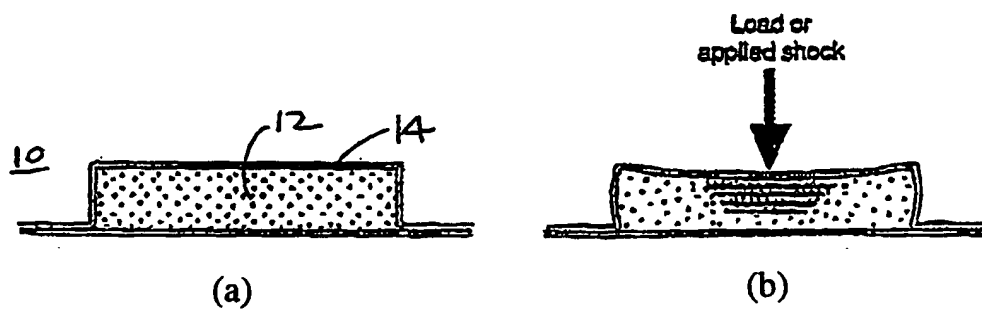


FIGURE 3

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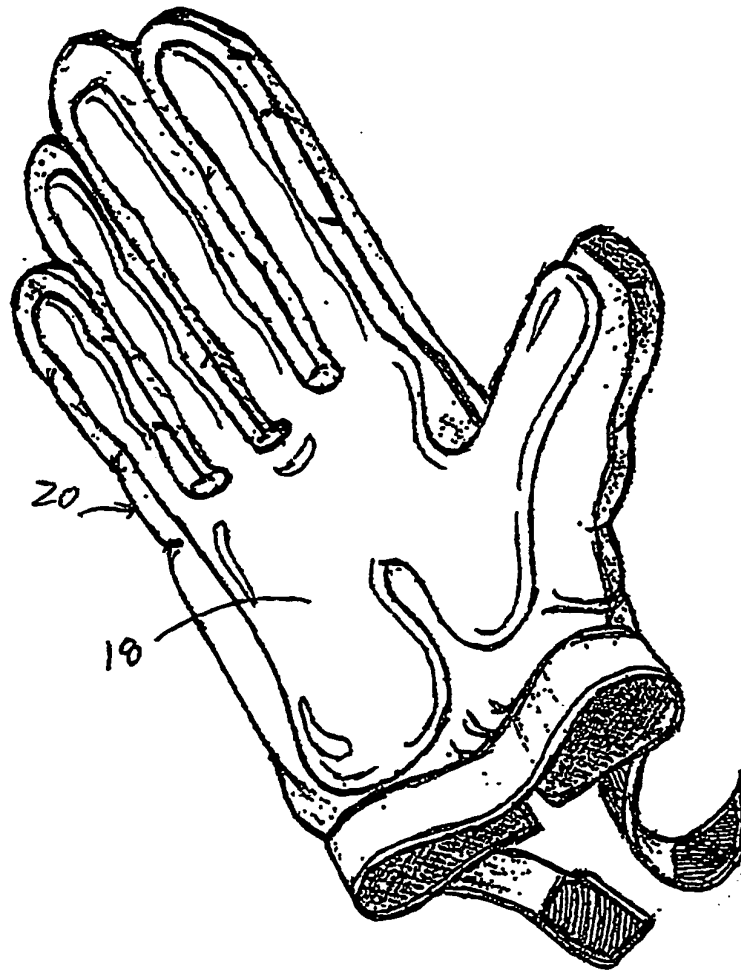
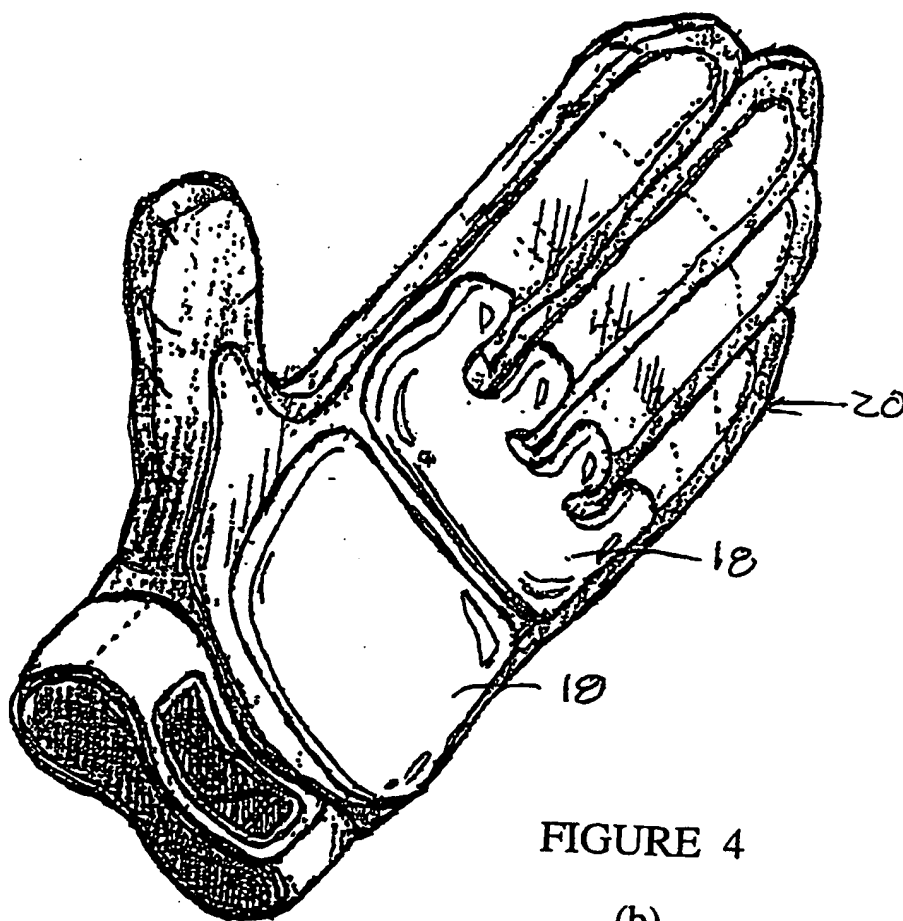


FIGURE 4
(a)

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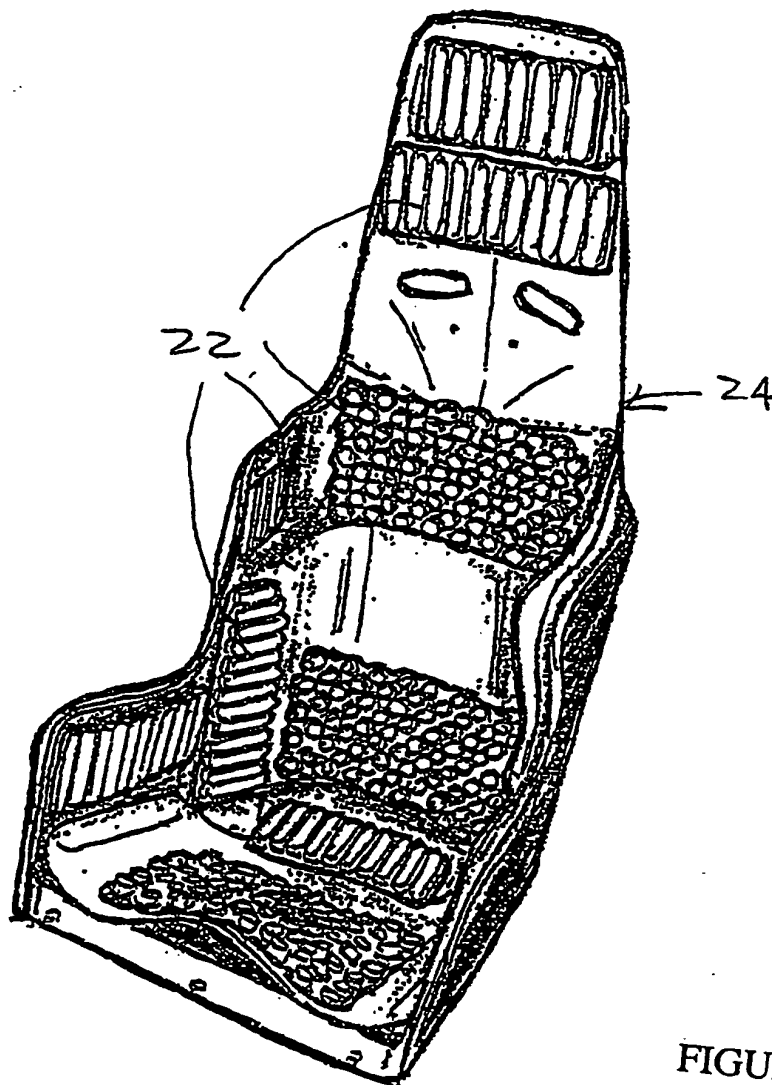


FIGURE 5

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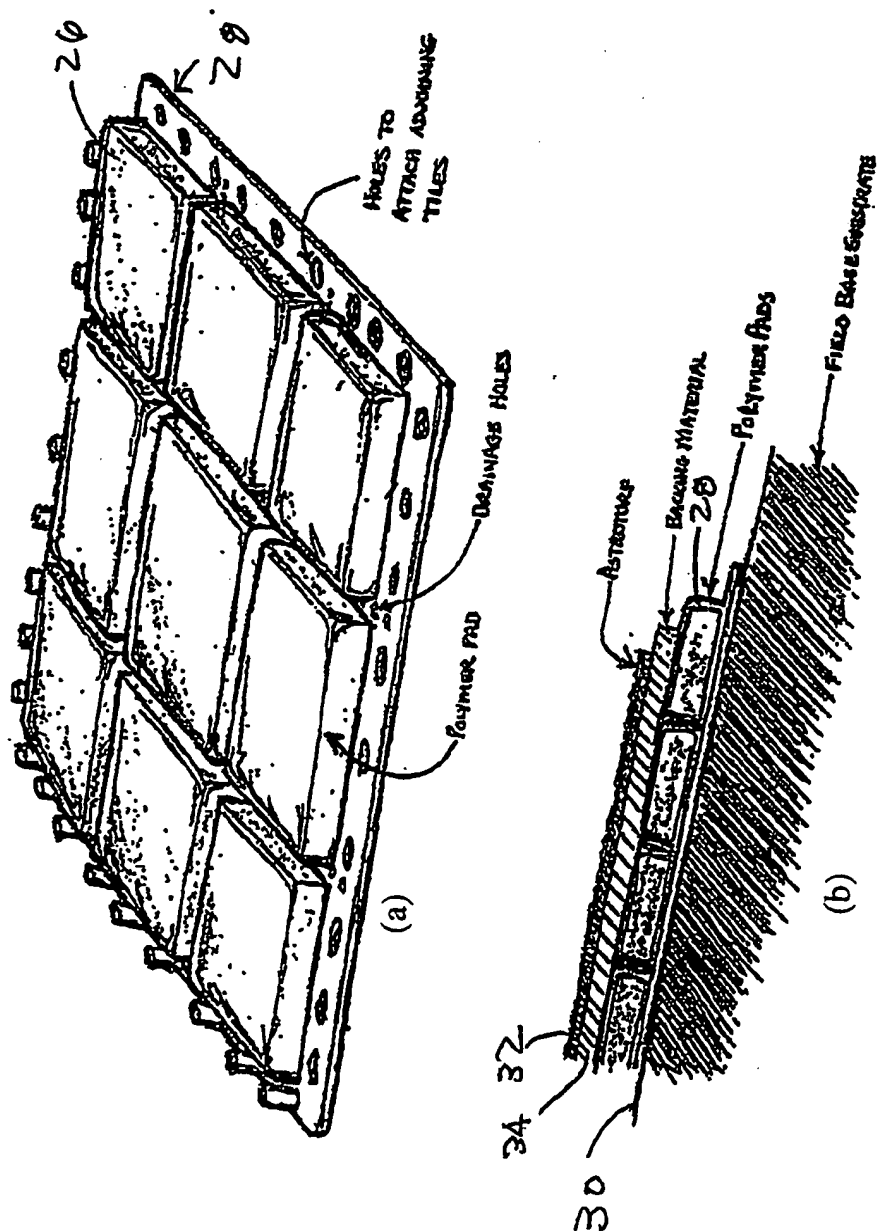


FIGURE 6

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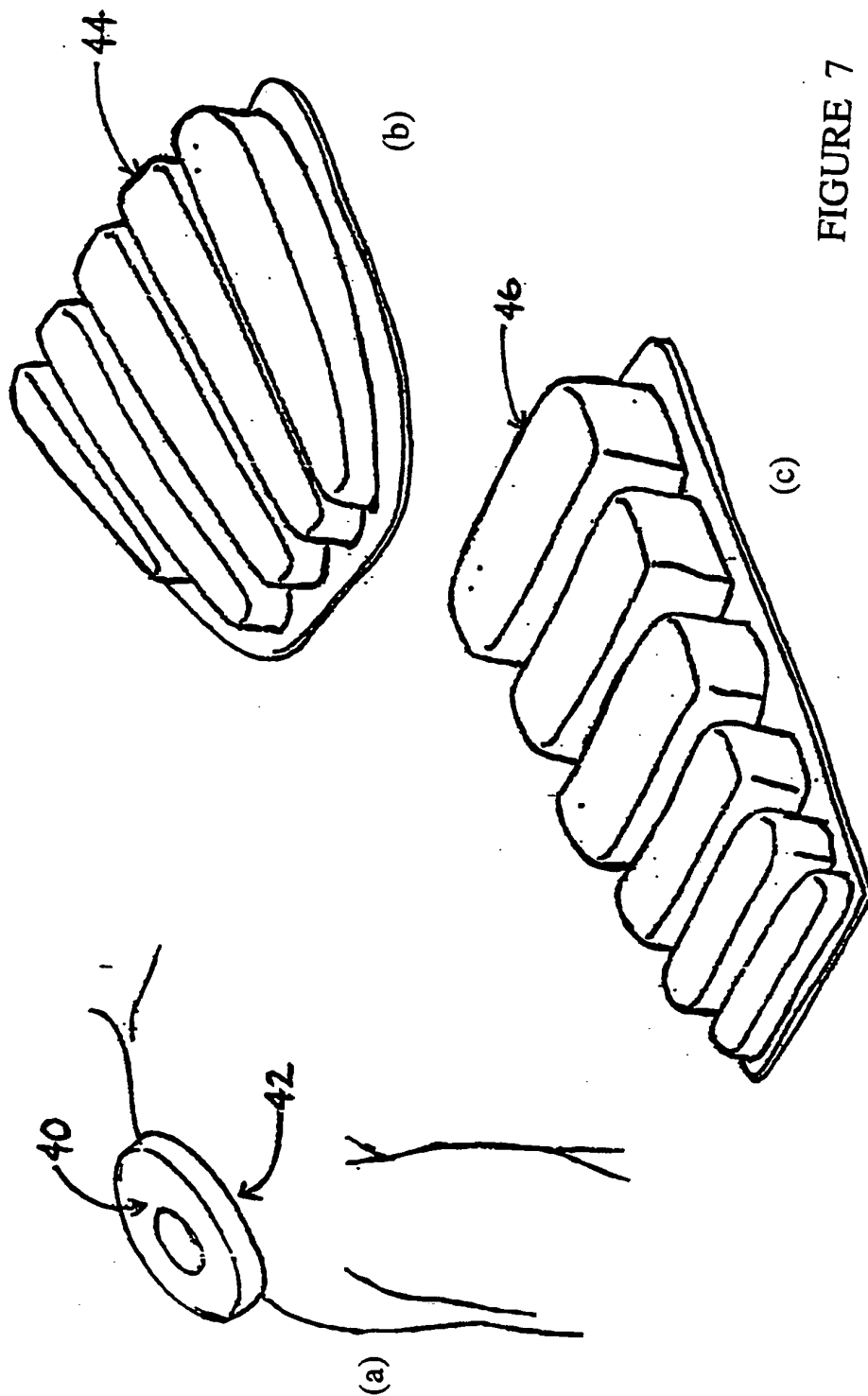


FIGURE 7

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International Application No

PCT/US 00/01479

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER
IPC 7 C08L83/14 C08L81/16

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)

IPC 7 C08L

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practical, search terms used)

CHEM ABS Data, EPO-Internal, PAJ, WPI Data

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

| Category * | Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages | Relevant to claim No. |
|------------|--|--|
| A | US 5 580 917 A (MACIEJEWSKI JEREMI ET AL) 3 December 1996 (1996-12-03) abstract example 1 | 3,4,6, 10, 15-18, 24, 27-29,32 |
| A | US 5 350 610 A (MASHITA NARUHIKO ET AL) 27 September 1994 (1994-09-27) column 1, line 9 - line 19 column 5, line 16 - line 60 | 3,4,6, 10, 15-18, 24, 27-29,32 |

☐ Further documents are listed in the continuation of box C.☒ Patent family members are listed in annex.

* Special categories of cited documents:

"A" document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance

"E" earlier document but published on or after the international filing date

"L" document which may throw doubts on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified)

"O" document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means

"P" document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed

"T" later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention

"X" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone

"Y" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art.

"&" document member of the same patent family

Date of the actual completion of the international search

10 July 2000

Date of mailing of the international search report

20/07/2000

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Hoepfner, W

International Application No. PCT/US 00 01479

FURTHER INFORMATION CONTINUED FROM PCT/ISA/ 210

Continuation of Box I.2

Claims Nos.: 1,2,5,7-9,11-14,19-23,25,26,30,31

Present claims 1,2,7,9,11,12,13,19-22,26 relate to a product or method defined by reference to a desirable characteristic or property, namely

- a) an energy absorbing medium comprising an elastomer or an elastomer-containing blend which behaves (depending on the kind of applied force) as solid or viscous liquid (claims 1,2,7,9,11,20-22),
- b) an energy absorbent article comprising said medium having said mechanical behaviour (claims 12,26),
- c) a method for forming an energy absorbing medium by mixing several components in order to arrive at a medium having the desired mechanical behaviour (claims 13,19,30).

The claims cover all products and methods having this characteristic or property, whereas the application provides support within the meaning of Article 6 PCT and/or disclosure within the meaning of Article 5 PCT for only a very limited number of such products and methods. In the present case, the claims so lack support, and the application so lacks disclosure, that a meaningful search over the whole of the claimed scope is impossible. Independent of the above reasoning, the claims also lack clarity (Article 6 PCT). An attempt is made to define the products and methods by reference to a result to be achieved. Again, this lack of clarity in the present case is such as to render a meaningful search over the whole of the claimed scope impossible.

Moreover, present claims 5,8,14,23,25,31 relate to an extremely large number of possible compounds. Support within the meaning of Article 6 PCT and/or disclosure within the meaning of Article 5 PCT is to be found, however, for only a very small proportion of the compounds claimed. Therefore, in the present case, said claims so lack support, and the application so lacks disclosure, that a meaningful search over the whole of the claimed scope is impossible.

Consequently, the search has been carried out for those parts of the claims which appear to be clear, supported and disclosed, namely those parts relating to the compounds, products and methods claimed in the remaining claims 3,4,6,10,15-18,24,27-29,32 and described on pages 11-18 of the description and in the worked Examples on page 15 of the description.

The applicant's attention is drawn to the fact that claims, or parts of claims, relating to inventions in respect of which no international search report has been established need not be the subject of an international preliminary examination (Rule 66.1(e) PCT). The applicant is advised that the EPO policy when acting as an International Preliminary Examining Authority is normally not to carry out a preliminary examination on matter which has not been searched. This is the case irrespective of whether or not the claims are amended following receipt of the search report or during any Chapter II procedure.

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

Information on patent family members

International Application No

PCT/US 00/01479

| Patent document cited in search report | | Publication date | Patent family member(s) | Publication date |
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